Acknowledgements

For the loan of comparative specimens, I reiterate my gratitude to the authorities of the museums acknowledged in Browning (1976). These include museums having paratypes of *portenkoi* listed herein: Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, Berkeley, California (MVZ), the Zoological Institute of the Academy of Sciences, Leningrad USSR (ZIAS) and the National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC (USNM). I especially thank V. A. Nechaev for his comments (*in litt.*) on the Sakhalin populations. Andrew Elzanowski kindly provided a translation of Nechaev's 2 papers and L. N. Kassianoff translated several other papers during the course of this and my earlier paper. I thank R. C. Banks, R. B. Clapp and S. L. Olson for reading the manuscript, and express appreciation for their helpful suggestions.

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Black-hooded Antwren *Formicivora* [*Myrmotherula*] *erythronotos* re-discovered in Brazil

by Fernando Pacheco

Received 27 February 1988

The Black-hooded Antwren *Formicivora* [*Myrmotherula*] *erythronotos* was described by Gustav Hartlaub (1852) from a skin in the Hamburg Museum, probably received from the Hamburg-born citizen C. H. Beske, who lived in Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro (22°16′S, 42°31′W) (Fig. 1), in the mountains of which the species has been thought to be confined. Burmeister (1856) found *F. erythronotos* in Nova Friburgo in the forest undergrowth, and observed that it lived in small groups. He also described one male and one female/immature male of the species. All the skins he collected were deposited at the Halle University Museum, in Germany. Burmeister travelled from the city of Rio de Janeiro to Lagoa

FIGURE 1

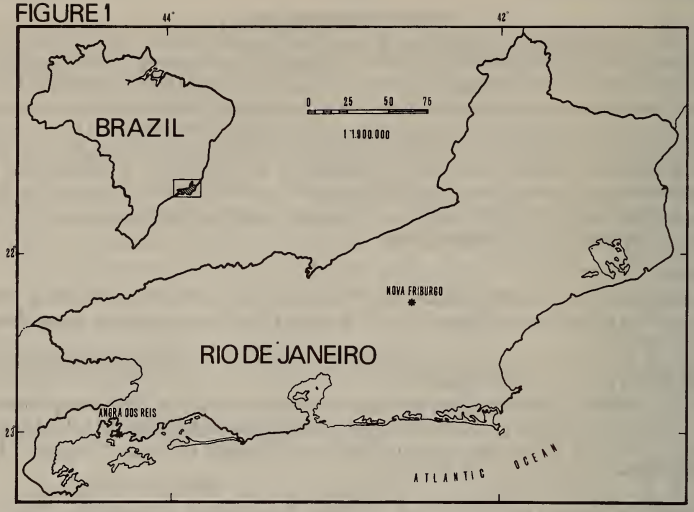

Figure 1. Map of Rio de Janeiro district to show Angra dos Reis, in the southwest, site of rediscovery of *Formicivora* [*Myrmotherula*] *erythronotos*.

Santa, in the State of Minas Gerais, staying in Nova Friburgo, from 24 December 1850 to 8 April 1851, where he was in contact with Beske.

In his 'Synopsis of the American Antbirds (Formicariidae)', Sclater (1858) redescribed the male, described the previously unknown female and mentioned additional skins at the British Museum (Natural History) (BMNH) and in his own collection, shipped from "Provincia do Rio de Janeiro". He also created the genus *Myrmotherula,* placing *Formicivora erythronotos* Hartlaub 1852 in this new genus. Sclater (1890) further confirmed the existence of 4 skins in the BMNH as from Rio de Janeiro but without defining the exact locality of origin. No other skins have been reported since. A total of about 20 specimens of the Black-Hooded Antwren is currently available in European and American Museums.

With so little information about this species, it is not surprising that Goeldi (1894), who published the first monograph about Brazilian birds, in Portuguese, and H. von Ihering (1900), in his synopsis about the Nova Friburgo birds, both omitted *F. erythronotos*. However, Nova Friburgo was given by Peters (1951)—based on Burmeister's account—as "the only definite locality" where the species is known.

Beske placed his ample collection at Burmeister's disposal (Burmeister 1853), but we surmise that many of Beske's skins came from collaborators and not necessarily from around Nova Friburgo. In fact, half of the 160 species recorded by Burmeister at Nova Friburgo (800–1000 m) are much more common at lower altitudes, and some are typical of these low altitudes. Examples of the latter are: *Busarellus nigricollis, Pyrrhura leucotis, Polytmus guainumbi, Monasa morphoeus, Pipra pipra* and *Tangara mexicana*. Other controversial records of Burmeister's are, for example, *Iodopleura pipra* in Lagoa Santa, Minas Gerais (Snow 1982) and *Herpsilochmus pileatus* in Nova Friburgo.

The possibility cannot be discounted that Burmeister's account of *F. erythronotos* in Nova Friburgo is not reliable either, and that the species has never been actually collected there. The collection that Burmeister took to Europe almost certainly included specimens furnished by Beske, which therefore could include material collected at low altitudes, including perhaps *F. erythronotos*.

Ruschi (1953) lists an occurrence of *F. erythronotos* in the State of Espirito Santo, but this record, although it has been adopted by some authors (Meyer de Schauensee 1966, Pinto 1978), has not been confirmed. The species was placed on the endangered birds list by Vincent (1966) and was supposed extinct by King (1978–1979) and by Scott & Brooke (1985).

On 24 September 1987, following the indications of Fernando and Cacilda Carvalho, Fernando Carvalho and I visited a site at sea level near Angra dos Reis, Rio de Janeiro (23°00′S, 44°18′W), and observed a pair of *F. erythronotos* foraging in a swampy patch of secondary forest, near the mangrove line. The area is in a rather flat narrow strip of land, situated in the foothills of the Serra do Mar, which here closely approached the ocean. We tape-recorded the birds' calls and 2 days later, returned to the same site and mist-netted the pair. After being photographed, they were released.

The present rediscovery partly resulted from the construction in the 1970s of a highway across the swampy region, where the species must have remained overlooked for such a long time. Later we also verified its presence in a dry secondary forest, close to the site of the rediscovery and also at sea level. In the first observations the birds were foraging in the foliage mainly up to 1 m from the ground, reaching sometimes up to 2 m. We noticed the presence of other individuals very close to the pair we were observing. This proximity of other individuals in a restricted area may explain the mild response which we obtained from play-back of the birds' vocalizations. Other bird species observed at this site were *Manacus manacus, Automolus leucophthalmus, Myrmotherula minor, M. unicolor* and *Amaurolimnas concolor*.

The song of the male consisted of a rapidly repeated single note, which we could transcribe as: *"tcho/tcho/tcho . . ."*, up to 40 or more notes in 4–8 seconds, with very slight variation in pitch and volume. The female emitted a song very similar to that of the male, but a little higher and with less volume. The female call consisted of a double emphatic note like *"tcherp-tcherp"*, the second note higher than the first.

To our surprise, the birds' repertoire unmistakably follows the pattern found in the *Formicivora* group, especially *F. serrana,* in both songs and calls. This relationship is supported by the bird's biometric proportions, especially the long tail, and the birds' general behaviour and appearance. The chief difference from the other known *Formicivora* is in its size, *erythronotos* being the smallest of any others in the group. For these reasons we are inclined to return *erythronotos* to *Formicivora*.

Acknowledgements

I would like gratefully to acknowledge the help given by the following: Paulo Sergio M. Fonseca for his collaboration in the field and in discussing and in writing this article; Luiz A. P. Gonzaga for his revision of the original draft, C. Eduardo Carvalho, Ricardo Gagliardi

and Luiz C. Marigo who kindly provided help in the field; Helmut Sick for his guidance and encouragement over the years; Nigel Collar who gave me the incentive to write this paper; John Roe for help with the English version of the text; Zelia Wolker and Leandro Gomes for assistance with the computer; and, of course, Cacilda and Fernando Carvalho for their well-informed hunch.

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Batis minima (Verreaux) new for Cameroon

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Received 7 March 1988

In the course of studies conducted by C.E. on the systematics, ecology and behaviour of Afrotropical forest flycatchers, especially Platysteirinae, several *Batis* spp. were examined in the collections of the British Museum (Natural History), Tring. It was found that included amongst *Batis poensis* Alexander (*sensu lato*) (including *occultus*) were 4 specimens of *Batis minima* (Verreaux), collected by G. L. Bates, from Bitye, River Ja, Cameroon (3°10′N, 12°20′E): 1 ♂, 5 March 1907, 1 ♂ and 1 ♀, 1 May 1914,